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## Book Review: *Tell Them We Are Going Home: The Odyssey of the Northern Cheyennes*. By John H. Monnett.

Alan Boye  
Lyndon State College

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*Tell Them We Are Going Home: The Odyssey of the Northern Cheyennes.* By John H. Monnett. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001. Maps, tables, photographs, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. xxix + 252 pp. \$27.95.

In September 1878 about three hundred Northern Cheyenne men, women, and children under the leadership of Dull Knife and Little Wolf fled Indian Territory in what is now Oklahoma in an attempt to return to their homeland in present-day Montana. Thousands of soldiers were eventually involved in a chase that turned into a 1,200 mile running battle of pain and sorrow. The following April less than half of the starving and sick Cheyenne reached Montana. Eventually they were granted a reservation there. Many of the others, mostly women, children, and old men, had been captured in Nebraska, and many of these would be killed after they escaped from imprisonment at Fort Robinson where they had been held for nearly two weeks without food and water.

With varying degrees of success, the story of the exodus of the Northern Cheyenne has been retold many times. Most famous, perhaps, is Mari Sandoz's 1953 fictional account, *Cheyenne Autumn*. While her brilliant ren-

dering of the Cheyenne point of view is underappreciated, both the selective use of historical records and the fictionalization of other details makes her work suspect as history. With unintended comic effect, John Ford's movie version of that novel replaced the open Plains of western Kansas with the towering mesas and dark buttes of Utah's Monument Valley.

On the other hand, talented and careful historians such as Ramon Powers have investigated aspects of the story and written important and often brilliant articles and monographs. Others have recorded limited oral testimony from the Northern Cheyenne about the events (see, for example, Margot Liberty and John Stands In Timbers's *Cheyenne Memories*, 1967). In spite of these, and despite the significance of the story, no single, comprehensive, coherent version of the exodus of the Cheyenne had been written.

None, that is, until now.

Author and historian John Monnett has investigated the numerous and widely scattered historical records of this tragic story and—with straightforward, no-nonsense prose—put all the pieces together to form a comprehensive, immensely valuable, and long-overdue account of the exodus.

Perhaps the best example of the mastery of his work is the chapter detailing the Cheyenne attacks on settlers in northwestern Kansas. Monnett's thorough research has uncovered numerous shards of evidence which he relays to the reader in concise, lucid, unflinching, and objective exposition. Only then does he give us his cautious, well-reasoned, and informed conclusions.

The book is not without minor flaws. The three-month internment and the massacre at Fort Robinson are treated with the same professional skill as the Kansas material, but rely on a less comprehensive summation of the historical record. Likewise Monnett makes no mention of the serendipitous nature of the "capture" of Dull Knife's segment of the group. He also misses the location of that site by fifty miles.

In addition, Monnett falls into an unfortunate trap. Relying on the record of historians who interviewed Cheyenne survivors and participants, he assumes that no other source of information regarding these testimonials exists. He says, for example, that since 1878, "the Cheyenne have purposely and understandably" not talked about the murder of Kansas settlers. Simply because there is no "historic record" does not mean they have purposely avoided talking about these events. In fact, the details of the exodus have been and continue to be an important topic of discussion and oral tradition on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. There are still living Cheyenne who heard and have preserved a *comprehensive testimony of those same witnesses* interviewed by white historians.

Monnett has made an excellent contribution to the history of the Northern Cheyenne that will long remain an invaluable rendering of the story. The current tragedy is that the Northern Cheyennes' own record of their exodus has yet to be sufficiently documented.

ALAN BOYE  
Department of English  
Lyndon State College